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SUBJECT: Weaknesses in the Support Structure of Soviet
Theater Forces and How They Grew

SUMMARY

The Soviet theater forces are short of air and ground combat support and of service (supply and maintenance) support. The condition is due in large measure to competition for men and resources among the various elements of national defense, strategic offense, and general purpose forces, in which the support elements of theater forces held lowest priority. The Soviets have rationalized the situation in theater forces on the basis of NATO nuclear policies, and have been caught off balance by the "flexible response" policy. Either completion of the "nuclearization" trend in Soviet theater force or reinstitution of nonnuclear capabilities is a very costly undertaking, not to the liking of current Soviet leadership.

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1. Recent studies, including ONE Staff Memorandum No. 52-63, "A Comparison of US and Soviet Organizational Concepts for Large Units," dated 7 August 1963, have indicated that Soviet theater

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forces may not be as formidable in depth as they appear to be when considered in terms of line divisions alone. On the face of it, the discrepancy appears to provide grounds for serious doubts concerning the validity of national intelligence estimates of Soviet theater force capabilities.

2. The following excerpts from NIE 11-14-62, "Capabilities of the Soviet Theater Forces," dated 5 December 1962, indicate that the intelligence community as a whole has recognized weaknesses in Soviet Bloc theater force support structure:

The Weaknesses

a. "Combat and service support is generally stretched thin, and there is a low ratio of nondivisional support to the present divisional force." (Para. 13)

b. "The estimated current and future number of Soviet tactical aircraft appear low in relation to total ground forces," (Para. 18)

c. "A current prime deficiency of Soviet Tactical Aviation is the lack of modern aircraft, particularly fighter bombers." (Para. 19)

d. "... shortages of other combat and support equipment (such as communications and transport), as well as of trained specialists for support units, would impede the expansion of force levels." (Para. 46)

e. "Satellite ground divisions ... suffer from a general shortage of nondivisional support." (Para. 41)

f. "Satellite field forces have very little tactical air support ... " (Para. 40)

g. "... shortfalls in organization, equipment and logistic support would hamper the actual execution of Soviet doctrine for the use of tactical nuclear weapons. (Para. 26)

3. These judgments, drawn from the current national estimate on Soviet theater force capabilities, are not too startling when encountered individually in the estimate. Taken together, they constitute national intelligence recognition of some highly significant weakness in the Soviet Bloc capability to wage theater warfare. They are, perhaps, understatements of the shortfalls in Soviet and Satellite theater forces, but they nonetheless put national intelligence in opposition -- albeit cautious opposition -- to the proposition of Soviet invincibility in nonnuclear warfare. This estimate

described Bloc theater forces as strong in terms of line divisions, but decidedly weak elsewhere -- e.g., in ground combat support, air support, nuclear support, logistics, and services. In NIE 11-14-62, the first national estimate exclusively devoted to theater forces, some weaknesses in the support structure of the Soviet theater forces were described for the first time in national intelligence.

4. National intelligence judgment, as well as structural comparisons between Soviet and US large units^{1/}, portray Soviet theater forces as a hard crust of line divisions, amazingly short of support. Gross comparison of total army strengths and totals of divisions indicate that the number of nondivisional personnel in the US "division slice"^{2/} could be as much as 10 times greater than in the Soviet "division slice." The discrepancy, on the face of it, is so great that it gives rise to legitimate doubts as to the number of Soviet divisions, the estimated total of Soviet personnel --^{3/} or even as to the reasonableness of the US Army support structure.

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ONE Staff Memorandum No. 52-63, "A Comparison of US and Soviet Organizational Concepts for Large Units," dated 7 August 1963. Attached Table portrays general results of that comparison.

2/

Total ground strength divided by total divisions. For the US Army: 16 divisions from about one million men; for the Soviets: 145 divisions from about 2 million men.

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Dr. Alain Enthoven's descriptive term for doubts raised by this problem is "The People Paradox."

5. As to the number of units which the Soviets call "divisions," there appears to be no large error. Several re-examinations of the ground force order of battle have upheld its general validity. The nature of these "divisions" and their peacetime operational status, however, is another matter.

6. Doubts about the total personnel figures are more in order. The overall strength figure of 3.25 million men for the Soviet Armed Forces is based on reasonably good evidence from a variety of sources.^{1/} The process of successive subtraction from this overall figure which eventually results in the extremely low level of nondivisional support personnel in theater forces is much more suspect. The estimate of two million men in the Soviet theater ground force^{2/} depends to a considerable extent on the estimated strengths of the other components. The low ratio of nondivisional troops within the two-million figure depends heavily upon estimated manning levels of the Soviet divisions.

^{1/} See NIE 11-6-60, "Strength of the Armed Forces of the USSR," dated 3 May 1960 and NIE 11-4-63, "Soviet Military Capabilities and Policies, 1962-1967," dated 22 March 1963, TOP SECRET.

^{2/} Soviet Ground Forces less troops assigned to National Air Defense (PVO), Ministry of Defense (MOD), R&D, and Rocket Troops.

7. The possibility cannot be ruled out that there are: somewhat more than the estimated total of personnel in theater ground forces; somewhat lower peacetime manning levels in Soviet divisions; and a somewhat lower ratio of high strength to cadre divisions. Alternative estimates in any of these matters could result in a higher support ratio -- but no reasonable alternatives would result in a ratio of divisional to nondivisional troops which is comparable to US force structure. Further, the limited evidence available on Soviet nondivisional support indicates that the very low ratio presently estimated is a fair representation of the actual state of affairs. The divisions exist in evidence -- the support structure does not. The remainder of this paper will examine the probable reasons for the peculiarities of Soviet theater force structuring.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET THEATER FORCES IN THE NUCLEAR ERA

A. Effect of Russian Traditions

8. Analysts, in attempting to explain the Soviet penchant for enormous ground armies, almost invariably recount the traditional Russian preoccupation with the land mass of Eurasia and the threat of invasion from Western Europe. These traditions are factual and

well known. They provide a very satisfactory explanation for emphasis on ground power over naval and air power, but they fall short of explaining Soviet adherence to mass-army concepts in the tradition-shattering era of nuclear armaments. While the Soviets indisputably adhered to a doctrine calling for an immediate rush of massive armies across Europe in the event of a general nuclear war, the military rationality of such a doctrine in the chaos of a massive nuclear exchange was, and is, highly disputable. It has been hotly disputed by military intelligence agencies in the West, and, at least during the past few years, by military men in the Soviet Union.

9. In the US intelligence community the Soviet doctrinal "lack of realism" was often dismissed under the rubric of "Soviet lack of sophistication" or "failure to understand the potentials of nuclear armament." "After all, they do not have a RAND Corporation," is a variation on this theme. Such explanations, however, gloss over the fact that "sophisticated" Western views on the essential relationships of nuclear weapons to theater force operations were readily available to the Soviets from the end of World War II. If US estimates of the Soviet nuclear program have been anywhere near the mark, the Soviets could have predicted

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availability of nuclear arms sufficient to allow nuclear sophistication in their doctrines and an end to traditional reliance on mass armies.

10. Traditional attitudes may have served to dampen enthusiasm for change, but they constitute a weak reed on which to support a rationalization of continued Soviet addiction to massive armies and to doctrines for their use in general war. The causes for the size and the shape of Soviet ground forces are more basic, involving the political use of military power (both real and apparent), internal political and economic pressures, and military developments in the West. The weight of these causes varied from time to time, but it is doubtful that tradition was ever the prime mover in Soviet force structuring in the nuclear era.

B. Political Uses of Ground Forces

11. At the beginning of the nuclear era the enormous Soviet Army proved its worth, in spite of the US nuclear monopoly, in the subjugation and communization of Eastern Europe. This use was primarily political, although on the military side, the Soviet armies proved an effective obstacle to any Western notions of reacting with force to Soviet activity in Eastern Europe. Later,

as native Communist armies replaced the Soviet troops, the political power of the Red Army was applied from outside the borders of most of the Satellites (including North Korea). In East Germany, however, political instability and the presence of opposing Western forces required the maintenance of a powerful theater force. The functions of insuring political stability and manning the main line of East-West military confrontation required large standing armies, both within parts of East Europe and along the borders of the USSR. These requirements were little affected by the presence or nonpresence of nuclear weapons on either side.

12. There was, however, another key function of the huge Soviet armies and their disposition directly related to the inferior position of the USSR regarding nuclear weapons. The desperate need of the Soviets for a deterrent to US application of its nuclear power (at least until the very recent past) can scarcely be over-rated as a reason for Soviet force structuring. The Soviets maintained massive ground armies -- and took pains to advertise them to the world -- as a counter to US nuclear power. While nuclear buffs in the West could point out that, militarily, massive armies couldn't really play in the same league with the H-bomb, history indicates that Soviet ground armies have played successfully in the same league -- politically.

13. During the Korean War, the ground power of massive Soviet armies facing Europe (albeit reinforced by token nuclear capabilities) provided the prime element of Soviet military power deterring the use of nuclear weapons, while an overwhelming US advantage in nuclear weapons did not deter the use of massive Communist armies. As is readily demonstrable in the ebb and flow of opinion in Western circles concerning the nature of Soviet long-range nuclear striking power, and the actions taken or not taken in the context of opinions prevalent, the political impact of the military factor is not always a function of real capability. It should be borne in mind that this may be as true of armies as of missiles and bombers.

C. Ground Forces in Internal Affairs

14. The role of Soviet armed forces in Soviet internal affairs is important, but has manifested itself only rarely, the most striking case being the demise of Beria. Despite party control, the influence of the military at times of acute political factionalism is potentially crucial. Military leaders move in high political circles, and some are members of the Central Committee. During periods of political maneuvering within the Soviet hierarchy, some elements court the support of the marshals, acceding to their views on military requirements. The growth in the size of the Soviet

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Army prior to Khrushchev's victory over the "antiparty group" and the subsequent demotion of Zhukov probably owes something to this factor. Whatever its effect on force structuring, the internal politics factor operates independently from nuclear considerations.

D. Economics and Theater Forces

15. The economic factor as a shaper of force structure is vital -- first to goals the Soviets set for themselves, and, second, perhaps more importantly, to adjustments away from those goals. The costs to the Soviet economy of the Soviet military establishment in terms of rubles, resources, or skilled manpower, would be important restraints on the structure of Soviet armed forces with or without the influence of nuclear weaponry. However, the advent of nuclear weapons has enormously reinforced the effects of economic considerations.

16. The primary effect of economics on the theater forces has been the drawing away of men and resources to strategic defense and offense missions. The economic squeeze on theater forces was not nearly so great in the line divisions as elsewhere. Soviet infantrymen and tankers and their equipment are not readily transmutable into strategic offensive or defensive assets; Soviet

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artillerymen, tactical sirmen, communications, truck drivers, engineers, maintenancemen are. Most of the support structure of the field forces could be used in the priority Soviet strategic efforts; and it is in this area that Soviet theater forces have suffered most in the nuclear era.

17. Missiles are artillery in the Soviet view, and large numbers of artillerists were absorbed by the missile forces. Soviet missile systems require large quantities of vehicular support including many special purpose vehicles. Missile site construction and maintenance absorb a large portion of Soviet engineer troops. Warning and control systems draw off high-skill communicators, signal maintenance men, and radar specialists. Further, all these new forces have to be on a constant wartime footing; late-period mobilization to meet support requirements for PVO or Rocket Troops is out of the question. In the competition for these scarce skills and resources, the Soviet theater forces have held a definite second priority.

E. Effects of Enemy Capabilities

18. The factors of enemy military capabilities and enemy military strategies provide the primary basis for shaping a nation's

armed forces. This is no less true of the Soviet Union than of other countries. The familiar inclination to state the overall Communist goal of world domination and then to describe Soviet armed forces as an instrument for achieving that goal tends to neglect the factor of opposing forces. Such an approach has frequently resulted in descriptions of Soviet theater forces as if they were an entity hermetically sealed off from the capabilities and strategies of probable adversaries. Since the interplay of opposing capabilities is largely history, their effects on theater forces can best be treated chronologically and in conjunction with other factors.

F. Post World War II Soviet and Western Force Structures

19. At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union had an enormous ground army -- about 600 line divisions of varying strengths and levels of effectiveness. The Western camp also had large ground forces, but in addition possessed strong strategic air forces and the atom bomb. The immediate post-war adjustments in Western forces, although influenced by a number of internal political pressures, were pegged in military terms primarily to the US nuclear monopoly. The modest-sized ground forces remaining were geared almost exclusively for nuclear war. There was no room in Western

doctrine or force structure for any clash with the Soviets short of nuclear war. The small Western armies became an occupation force in practice and a trip wire for nuclear war in doctrine.

20. The immediate postwar adjustments in the Soviet armed forces were less radical. Wartime forces were reduced to about 4,000,000, including some 175 line divisions. This was still an enormous standing force, but was in the old Russian tradition. Tradition plus internal and external political factors would have impelled Stalin to retain a large ground force regardless of the Western capabilities. Nevertheless, one reason for the maintenance of a huge army while the war-ravaged civil sector was short of manpower was the Western advantage in strategic strike power. The Soviets were countering with their only military advantage -- mass armies.

G. The 1947-1948 Red Army

21. In order to examine the changes that have taken place in the Soviet theater forces, one must clearly visualize the nature of their 1947 forces. The Soviets had a considerable number of large tank formations, but the bulk of the Soviet Army was straight infantry -- foot-mobile with animal drawn support. There were even horse cavalry corps in the force. Trucks were

few and far between. In the best of the Soviet forces, those in East Europe, there were few motor vehicles assigned below army headquarters. The manpower of the force was about evenly divided between line divisions and nondivisional supporting units (higher headquarters, artillery, engineers, supply, maintenance, medical units, etc.). Artillery "divisions" accounted for the bulk of the combat support. Other combat support and service elements were minimal. Such an austere support structure was possible for a relatively primitive force like the postwar Red Army. A steady supply of ammunition and a relatively small amount of POL products were about all that was needed to keep the force moving. Strong backs and improvisation filled in the gaps. Further, the Soviet forces had adapted their operational concepts to a weak logistics system. Not being able to sustain a steady replacement flow of men and materiel, they would amass men and materiel, go over to the offensive until they had consumed or outrun their logistics, then wait for a thorough replenishment.

H. Modernization Program, 1947-1959

22. After the war, the Soviets initiated a modernization program to eliminate rifle and cavalry divisions and to create a highly mobile heavily armored force which could prove viable in

the nuclear environment. The modernization of any army is a complex, costly and time-consuming undertaking. This process, when applied to the huge, unsophisticated Soviet Army of 1947, takes on staggering proportions. The re-equipping of line divisions alone was difficult enough. Reorganization of the supporting elements was to be even more fundamental and more difficult. In the combat support area, more mobile artillery was needed, as was more and better engineer support (particularly bridging), more and better communications, and modern tactical aviation. A field army air defense system had to be constructed from near "scratch". In the service support area, POL supply and maintenance requirements for the new divisions were enormous compared with those of the old rifle divisions. Diesel fuel and spare parts cannot be "improvised." The modernization of the Soviet army made heavy demands on some of the scarcest resources of the Soviet Union -- motor vehicles, electronics equipment, and skilled personnel.

23. Concurrently with the modernization of the Soviet theater forces, the East European Satellite armies, totalling about one million men, were to be organized and equipped from the ground up.

I. Modernization of Line Divisions

24. Despite the dimensions of the task, the modernization program within the divisions went fairly well. By the end of 1959,

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the Soviets had apparently succeeded in their goal of eradicating the World War II type divisions* and the Army ostensibly contained only tank, motorized (or mechanized) and airborne divisions.

25. In planning the reorganization of the divisions in the late 1940's, the Soviet military leaders had certain things going for them, provided they were willing to live with considerable obsolescence. In the first place, there were enormous quantities of World War II items in inventory, particularly tanks and artillery. The production lines for newer models of tanks, multiple rocket launchers and small arms were still rolling. Other major items of divisional equipment, such as armored personnel carriers, amphibians, armored antiaircraft vehicles, and tracked artillery prime movers were apparently already scheduled to go into production in a year or so. By about 1950, these items were in production as well as new medium (T-54) and heavy (T-10) tanks.

26. With these favorable factors operating, and with added impetus from their good showing as a counterdeterrent during the Korean War, the Soviet line divisions were well over the reorganization hurdles in the late 1950's. There had been some serious

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Significantly, however, five horse cavalry divisions apparently remained in the Soviet order of battle as late as 1956. (See NIE 11-4-56, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through 1961." TOP SECRET)

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compromises along the way, but the line divisions had been modernized and partially re-equipped. Manpower reductions lowered the number of divisions by about 15 percent, and the peacetime manning levels were reduced to the point where many of the divisions were only cadres. Despite the production of new tanks, the divisions still contained World War II models. * Some equipment was adopted as standard which was undoubtedly far short of desired military specifications. For instance, the BTR-40 and BTR-152 armored personnel carriers, which were the basic items changing straight infantry divisions to motorized/mechanized infantry divisions, were in essence Russian small and medium general purpose trucks with light armor added. The BTR-152 had no overhead cover from artillery and mortar fire, and being wheeled rather than tracked, had poor cross-country mobility. Production of the BTR-152

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The contradiction between an estimated sufficiency of new tanks produced and evidence of the persistence of old tanks in units has been rationalized as resulting from Soviet supply economy. However, this does not jibe with the need to train with new equipment nor with the Soviet doctrine of immediate use of the ground forces in the event of general war. A more likely explanation, in this analyst's opinion, is that new tank production estimates are in error. Marshal Malinovsky, in late 1962, wrote in a pamphlet "Vigilantly Guard Peace," that commanders should stop complaining about the obsolescent equipment in the units -- not on the grounds of supply economy, but on the grounds that new equipment cannot be produced fast enough to meet all demands.

was discontinued by 1959 after an estimated 18,600^{1/} had been produced -- enough to fully motorize fewer than 40 of the total of 79 Soviet and 16 Satellite divisions which (according to our estimates) had been converted to motorized rifle divisions.^{2/} By 1959, tracked APC's (BTR-50) are estimated to have been produced in numbers sufficient to satisfy requirements of Soviet tank divisions but not those of the Satellite tank divisions.

J. Modernization of Supporting Elements

27. By 1959, the "reorganization" of the line divisions could be considered complete, despite gaps in the re-equipping schedule.

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This and other estimates of Soviet production of ground force items are tenuous. In the opinion of this analyst, the production figures are more apt to be high than low, particularly in the case of the BTR-152. It is basically a truck, and its production competed directly with other Soviet requirements in both civilian and military sectors.

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NIE 11-4-59, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1959-1964," dated 9 February 1960, (TOP SECRET), estimated 79 Soviet and 16 Satellite motorized rifle divisions. The strength per division in APC's was estimated to be 521. Assuming every APC was in divisions, there could have been 37 divisions fully equipped. In the likely case that at least 20 percent of the production went into pipeline and maintenance float, there would have been about 30 actual motorized rifle divisions. As of mid-1963, after a sharp reduction in estimates of APC's per motorized rifle division (521 to 383), the number produced is still less than half the total required by currently estimated OB.

In comparison, the revamping of the support structure of theater forces travelled a rocky road, indeed. Political factors, enemy capabilities, and manpower and economic problems all plagued the effort to modernize the combat and service support echelons of Soviet theater forces.

28. The political applications of Soviet ground power, reinforced by a traditional Russian emphasis on the combat elements at the expense of support elements, encouraged unbalanced development of "modernized" Soviet theater forces. The usefulness of the theater forces in the promotion of political stability depended on the police power of infantrymen and tankers -- not on quartermasters and mechanics. The use of the theater force as a deterrent to US application of nuclear power also depended upon a frightening number of divisions much more than on a sound supporting structure. These political factors helped to cause supporting troops to come out a decided second best in any contest with the line divisions for shrinking manpower and material resources.

29. Realities of the military problem facing the Soviets in Europe also argued against emphasis on combat and service support. Despite an official doctrine insisting that war would be protracted, there were undoubtedly some pragmatic misgivings about the viability

of Soviet rear echelons in any battle with the all-nuclear NATO. Thus, both political factors and military realities caused the competition for resources, which squeezed the Soviet theater forces as a whole, to be resolved primarily at the expense of the combat and service support elements.

K. Effect of Strategic Missions on Theater Forces

30. Soviet national air defense requirements have competed with theater forces since the end of World War II. There was no room for debate in giving air defense priority over theater force developments since US strategic air power threatened survival of the USSR as a state. Massive Soviet efforts in AAA gun defenses,* interceptors, SAMs, and the PVO warning and control system had drastic effects on the Soviet support theater force structure.

31. Artillery support for the Soviet line divisions was adversely affected by the requirements of national air defense. Production concentrated on AAA guns and ammunition for those guns was not available for improved field artillery pieces and ammunition.

* A recent RAND study indicates that the Soviet expenditures on AAA guns alone between 1946 and 1961 was five times the total expenditure for the intercontinental bomber force.

The best communications and radar equipment and specialists went to the warning and control system. Every large AAA gun tied up a prime mover and ammo trucks that might have been used in front and army artillery.

32. The interceptor effort was enormous during the late 1940's and through the 1950's. The inventory of operational fighters reached over 10,000. Except for a few light bombers, theater air became a mere extension of FVO. Theater forces were provided interceptors such as the MIG-15 and MIG-17 for tactical fighters. Their poor characteristics for offensive missions must have been obvious to the Soviet commanders, but the need for maximum interceptor production and for optimum defensive capability in tactical aviation proved too demanding for concurrent development and production of a tactical fighter comparable to the Western fighter bomber.

33. The advent of SAMs did little to alleviate the strain on Soviet artillery and tactical aviation of supporting FVO. While the SA-2 was roadable, mobile enough to provide some flexibility for homeland

defense, it was not mobile enough for theater force air defense needs. Tactical aviation remained the keystone of field force air defense, and tactical aircraft, even the later models, remained basically interceptors.

34. During the years 1949-1959 the PVO expansion was accompanied by the creation of a strategic bomber force of modest proportions. The development of Long-Range Aviation (LRA) did not put appreciable additional strain on theater forces. The actual production of the bombers probably had direct effect only on the combat support of airborne divisions, where modern transports such as AN-12 and AN-8 did not appear until the bomber effort tapered off. However, the cumulative effect of vehicular support requirements, both for day-to-day maintenance of LRA and for airfield construction and maintenance, was considerable. Both PVO and LRA operations made large and inescapable demands on a scarce commodity -- trucks; the theater forces had to take up the slack in a shortage of "motorization" in the line divisions, and a near lack of it in service support elements.

35. The addition of tactical missile systems to the Soviet theater forces and strategic missiles to the long-range strike forces since 1959 intensified the squeeze on theater forces. Missile

forces imposed additional and even heavier requirements for the skills and equipment needed for theater force support troops, further retarding the development of combat and service support elements.

L. The Effect of Tactical Nuclear Adjustments

36. Adaptation of combat support to nuclear strategy was most evident in adjustments in Soviet artillery. If the Soviets were to fight in a nuclear environment, the old hub-to-hub massing of artillery would never do. Such a system would simply result in creation of highly lucrative targets for the enemy. The options open to the Soviets to correct this situation were (1) make their artillery less vulnerable through self-propelled artillery and a US-style fire direction system which allows dispersion of firing units; or (2) replace massed artillery firepower with nuclear weapons. They chose the latter course, largely because they foresaw no conventional wars but also because it fit the realities of their hardware and manpower problems. As a result, Soviet breakthrough artillery divisions disappeared by 1959, and the number of indirect fire weapons in division artillery was halved. They were to be replaced by relatively small numbers of tactical rockets and missiles.

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37. A similar combination of reasoning and circumstance apparently caused the Soviets to believe that the offensive weakness of tactical aviation could be offset by proliferation of the MBBM/IRBM deployment sufficient to assure destruction of NATO tactical air bases in a nuclear war.

II. SOVIET THEATER FORCES SINCE 1959

The Military Debate over Theater Forces

38. As tactical nuclear weapons and missiles became available in significant numbers to support Soviet theater forces (in the late 50's, early 60's) their effectiveness in the nuclear environment increased. Paradoxically, at about the same time, the deterrent role of the massive Soviet ground armies was transferred to the strategic missiles and the need for those ground armies in an actual nuclear war was challenged.

39. In a celebrated series of military writings (IRONBARK), the application of nuclear weapons to theater warfare was discussed from every angle. The basic issue in the controversy was: Are theater forces of the size we are ~~maintaining~~ really necessary, now that we have nuclear armed missiles? The bulk of the military leadership argued that the massive armies were still required. All

the arguments about the importance of the "initial period of the war", the validity of "strategic defense and offense", the probability of surprise attack, and so on, were not separate issues in the military debate. They were all part and parcel of support or rebuttal of Khrushchev's proposition that the size of the armed forces, particularly of the ground armies, should be cut.

40. In the course of the debate, the improbability of a massive mobilization and movement of troops after a Western surprise attack was discussed, and proved almost impossible to refute. The prospect of a Western surprise strike was enough to raise questions about the general viability of the ground armies in general war.

41. The traditionalist school obviously lost a round in the debate sometime prior to the Khrushchev 1960 announcements of a one-third force reduction. The reduction affected theater forces primarily. The most dramatic result was the drastic reduction in theater force air strength. Tactical Aviation has been reduced by 2,000 fighters and 2,000 light bombers since 1959. This compounded the qualitative weakness of Soviet tactical air by creating a low ratio of aircraft to supported troops.

42. The changes in the ground forces were less readily perceptible, and are not yet fully known. According to national estimates before and after the 1960 force reductions, 28 Soviet divisions were deactivated, and the number of artillery divisions cut by one half. The 175 divisions prior to the reduction included 23 tank, 79 motorized (and/or mechanized), 63 rifle, and 10 airborne divisions. All of these divisions were estimated at about 70 percent strength with a ratio of supporting personnel to line division personnel something under 1 to 1.5. The 1961 estimated ground force of 147 divisions included 26 tank, 87 motorized, 26 rifle, and 8 airborne divisions. Of these, 90 were at about 70 percent strength, the remaining 57 at about 30-40 percent strength. Strength in line divisions dropped by over half a million and in "ready" divisions by 750,000. In terms of "ready" divisions with air and heavy artillery support, the strength of Soviet theater forces was cut in half in the years 1959 thru 1961.

43. Much of this apparent reduction in the ready strength of the Soviet theater forces may be the result of bad estimates. However, there is probably a reasonably direct relationship between theater air and ground strength, and the nearly two-thirds reduction in tactical aviation is well established in evidence.

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NIE 11-4-59 and NIE 11-4-61, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1961-1966, Annexes A and B," dated 24 August 1961, TOP SECRET.

44. We now know that new, smaller TOEs for the Soviet divisions were adopted around 1959-60. Authorized personnel strengths were reduced by about 20 percent. The numbers of tanks in line divisions dropped. The authorized number of armored personnel carriers and general purpose vehicles estimates to be in the motorized rifle divisions dropped sharply. The numbers of artillery pieces were cut in both tank and motorized rifle divisions, but two FROG launchers were added to the TOE, giving the divisions an organic nuclear delivery capability.

45. The 1959-1961 changes in the Soviet forces did not represent merely the effects of a loss of the doctrinal argument by the traditionalist military spokesmen. In retrospect we can see that the ambitious modernization program was altered. The goal of full motorization and mechanization of all the line divisions was scaled down probably as a result of economic difficulty. Even the interrupted force reduction had the effect of reducing the "combat ready" theater forces sharply, perhaps as much as 50 percent.

46. During the years since 1959, the competition for men and materiel (particularly vehicles), between the expanding Rocket Troops and the support structure for theater forces intensified.

The discrepancy between the number of divisions and their support requirements grew as the divisional elements were modernized and nondivisional elements were not.

III. OVERADJUSTMENT AND FLEXIBLE RESPONSE

47. In the 15 years following World War II, the Soviets labored to shape their ground forces to the NATO nuclear strategy -- not because of a preference for nuclear war, but because they saw no other alternative. The Soviet Army became heavily armored -- because armor offers protection from nuclear weapons. A great deal of the famed Soviet artillery was traded in for a few rockets and missiles. Offensive tactical aircraft were also sacrificed to the missile concept. Improved defensive tactical aircraft were delayed by expectations of mobile field army SAMs -- weapons that never materialized. Combat and service support elements vital to sustained combat became minimal. In the "quick-or-never" environment posed by NATO strategy, the Soviets apparently felt they could risk lack of sustaining power in favor of numbers of line divisions.

48. One can imagine the impact on Soviet military leaders, having thus modified their theater forces, of the "flexible response" strategy of the past few years. On the one hand, despite

continuing efforts to gear them for nuclear war, Soviet theater forces were short of nuclear delivery means and weapons. An exercise in 1961 had just demonstrated the woeful inadequacy of nuclear support to theater forces. ~~On the other hand,~~ the Soviet theater forces had adjusted to the nuclear environment. Artillery was short. Offensive tactical air was extremely limited. Service support was very weak. Correction of these deficiencies would prove costly, and Khrushchev was not looking for more ways to spend money. The size (and cost) of Soviet theater forces was already under attack by 1959.

49. Recognition of limited and local war and of a "firebreak" between the use of conventional and nuclear weaponry has been inherent in Soviet military writing for years, but the attention given the subject has picked up sharply in the past year or so -- obviously as a reaction to "flexible response." The attitudes toward "flexible response" and nonnuclear warfare have varied widely between various Soviet spokesmen. The traditionalist marshals, perhaps to make an argument for retaining the massive theater forces, appear to overplay the effects of flexible response, describing an all out assault by West Germany with conventionally armed missiles and aircraft as an example of a possible

future war. Their opponents try to dismiss flexible response as a US gimmick for getting an all-out nuclear war under way. Both attitudes are found in Sokolovskiy's book Military Strategy. The actual Soviet policy toward the new wrinkle in Western strategy is unknown and not likely to be revealed.

50. The status of Soviet armed forces today provides a better indicator of probable Soviet reactions to a nonnuclear military situation, than do their utterances on the subject. The over-adjustment of Soviet theater forces to nuclear warfare makes it difficult for the Soviets to engage in nonnuclear warfare, but Soviet nuclear inferiority in both the strategic and tactical areas would make nonnuclear war by far the lesser evil.

IV. SUMMARY

51. The Soviet theater forces are short of air and ground combat support and of service (supply and maintenance) support. The condition is due in large measure to competition for men and resources among the various elements of national defense, strategic offense, and general purpose forces, in which the support elements of theater forces held lowest priority. The Soviets have rationalized the situation in theater forces on the basis of NATO nuclear

policies, and have been caught off balance by the "flexible response" policy. Either completion of the "nuclearization" trend in Soviet theater force or reinstitution of nonnuclear capabilities is a very costly undertaking, not to the liking of current Soviet leadership.



25X1

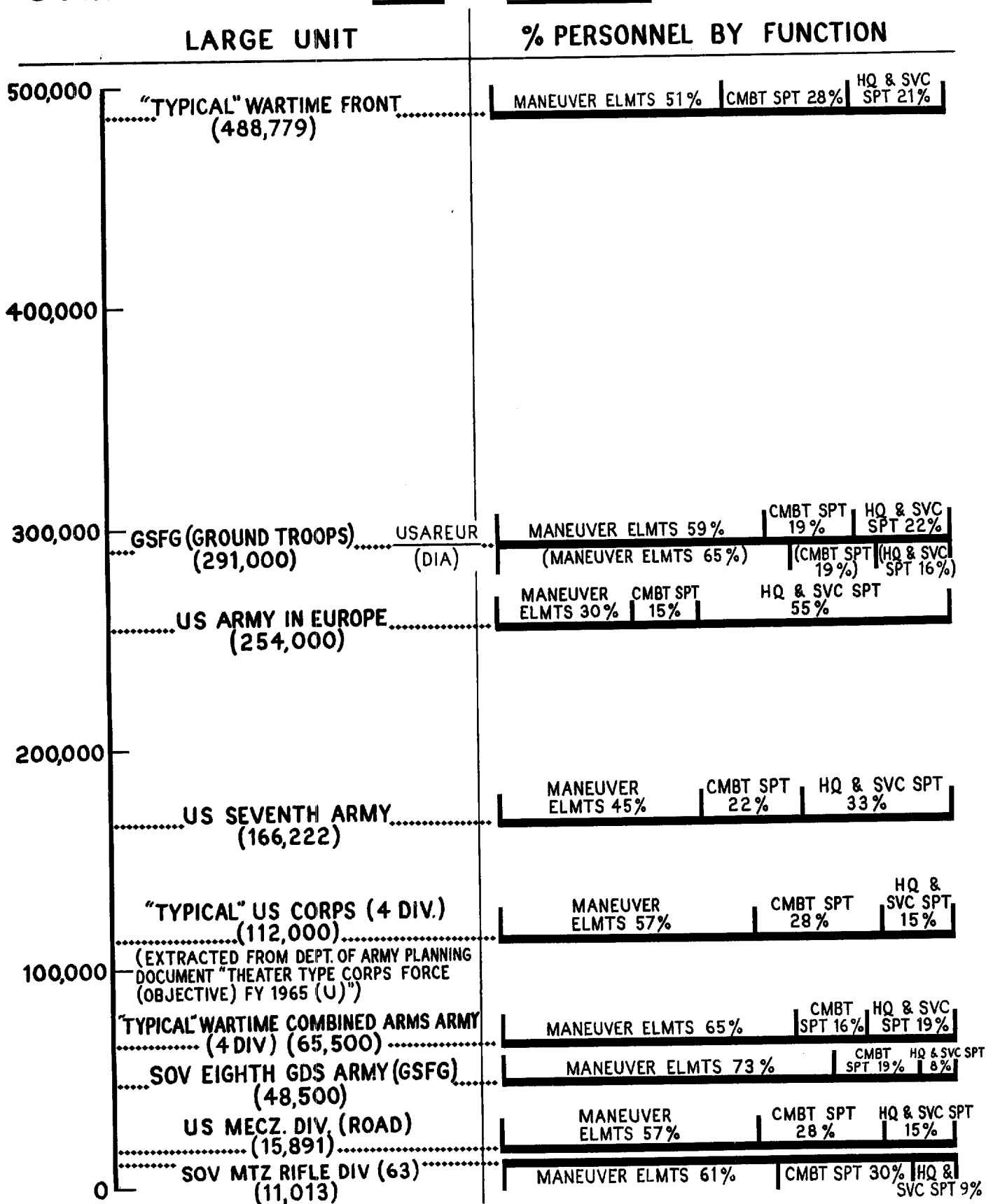
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COMPARISON OF US & SOVIET LARGE UNITS



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